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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on the theory of ethnographic methodology. A body of observational studies in social science and educational research is noted, demonstrating methodological statements about ethnography. Methodological procedures are described, along with possible standards of adequacy for their use. The use of the methodology is discussed in the contexts of general educational research and program evaluation studies. Guidelines are also presented for the appropriate use of ethnographic evaluation. (Author/RL)

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ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY: THEORY AND APPLICATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

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ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY: THEORY AND APPLICATION
IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

This paper presents a brief introduction to a genre of research which has been called by various names such as educational anthropology, ethnography, participant-observation, case study, field study, and naturalistic inquiry. In general, I will use these terms as synonyms.

There are several reasons for this overview. First, the methodology appears very simple in contrast to other modes of inquiry. Biddle (1967) stated observation "is the broadest and simplest methodology used in classroom studies." The researcher or evaluator spends some time in a setting taking notes and writes a report, a dissertation or a book. Second, a growing group of researchers, evaluators (Guba, 1978; Hamilton, Jenkins, King, MacDonald and Parlett, 1974) and policy-makers (i.e., NIE's School Capacity for Problem Solving, NSF's Case Studies on Science Education, and various Centers for Evaluation) have encouraged inquiry and evaluation using these procedures. Third, discussion and debate regarding case study design is general and ethnography in particular continues among several well known methodologists. Scriven (1967) attacked "process studies" and "noncomparative evaluation" in his provocative paper on evaluation but, more recently has modified his position, at least on the issue of objectivity and subjectivity (1972). Campbell and Stanley's (1963) classical chapter on experimental research in education viewed the "one-shot case study" as a design subject to all sources of internal and external invalidity. In a recent unpublished version of his Kurt Lewin Award address, Campbell (1974) modified his views by stating in a few paragraphs that qualitative case studies: (1) "regularly contradict the prior expectations of the authors,

and are convincing and informative to skeptics like me to a degree which my simple-minded rejection does not allow for" (p. 24), (2) (give) "a probing and testing power which I had not allowed for" (p. 25), and (3) "validly pick up unanticipated effects missed by more structural approaches" (p. 25). He suggests in a division of labor in large scale projects where specialists may produce partial knowledge, that "a project anthropologist, sociologist, or historian, assigned to the task of common-sense acquaintance with the overall context including the social interactions producing the measures, could often fill this gap" (p. 25). As House (1977) notes, even Cronback has suggested interpreting data in context rather than automatically imposing physical science paradigm to arrive at generalizations. "When two of the leading scholars of measurement and experimental design, Cronback and Campbell, strongly support qualitative studies, that is strong endorsement indeed" (p. 18).

This paper focuses on the theory of ethnographic methodology. The existence of a body of observational studies in social science and in educational research with a literature of methodological statements is demonstrated. Methodological procedures are described with standards of adequacy. Finally, the paper discusses the use of the methodology in two contexts: general educational research and program evaluation studies.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH TRADITIONS, STUDIES AND METHODOLOGICAL STATEMENTS

Participant-observation is the traditional methodology of anthropologists who study foreign cultures by living an extended time in the society. Placed in a novel situation usually with a communication barrier, the anthropologist falls back on the most obvious and unobtrusive method of data collection: observing and taking notes. Margaret Mead's Growing Up in New Guinea (1930),

Bronislaw Malinowski's Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922) and Murray Wax's studies of the American Indians are examples.

In addition, participant-observation is the methodology used by the winners of the most prestigious sociological research awards given by the American Sociological Association (Becker, 1970). Examples of sociological studies are George Homans, The Human Group (1950), A. W. Gouldner, Wildcat Strike (1954), P. Selznick, TVA and Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organizations (1949), Howard S. Becker, Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School (1961), and W. F. Whyte, Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum (1952).

In educational research, the increased publication of ethnographic studies, presentation of research papers at the American Educational Research Association annual meetings and methodological writings indicate recognition of the research contributions obtained through this methodology. In a recent attempt to demonstrate that a substantial body of educational research has been conducted in this genre of methods, Louis M. Smith (1978) developed a chart citing observational studies of educational phenomena: school and community, school systems and interorganizational systems, schools, classrooms, curricula and program evaluation, and special programs.

Insert Chart 1 About Here

Methodological statements in the form of papers, Appendices to studies, monographs, books, and collections of methodological writings are found more easily in sociology and anthropology. However, an increasing number of educational researchers and evaluators have spoken to the methodological issues

School and Community	School Systems and Interorganizational Educational Systems	Schools	Classrooms	Curricula and Program Evaluation	Teaching Careers and Student Teaching
Henry (1963, 1966)	CERI (1973)	Atwood (1960)	Cazden, John, & Hymes (1972)	Applegate (1971)	Becker (1951)
Singleton (1967)	Lutz (1962)	Barker & Gump (1964)	Cicourel (1974)	Bellel (1972, 1973)	Eddy (1969)
Spindler (1963)	Pohland (1970)	Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss (1961)	Delamont (1976)	Berlak, A., et al (1975)	Finch (1978)
Warren (1967)	Schumacher (1975)	Charters, Evemart, Jones, Packard, Pellegrin & Wacaster (1973)	Elliott & Adelman (1977)	Eisner (1975)	Iannaccone (1963)
Wax, Wax & Du Mont (1964)	Smith (1977b)	Cusick (1973)	Gump (1967)	Easley (1974)	Sarason, Davidson, & Blatt (1962)
Wolcott (1967)		Iannacconne (1958)	Henry (1957, 1966)	Hall & Thurnau (1975)	
		Jackson (1968)	Leacock (1969	Hamilton (1977)	
		McPherson (1972)	Lipnick (1976)	Munro (1977)	
		Mercurio (1972)	Rice (1964)	Reid & Walker (1975)	
		Reynolds (1973)	Smith & Geoffrey (1968)	Russell (1969)	
		Rist (1973)	Tikunoff, Berliner, & Rist (1975)	Seif (1971)	
		Sarason (1971, 1972)		Smith & Carpenter (1972)	
		Smith & Keith (1971)		Smith & Pohland (1974)	
		Walker (1932)		Smith & Schumacher (1972)	
		Wolcott (1977)		Soloman (1971)	
				Stake and Easley (1978)	
				Walker (1971)	
				Wolfson (1974)	
				Wolcott (1977)	

CHART 1

Observational Studies of Educational Systems (Smith, 1978, p. 321-2).

Papers and Chapters	Monographs and Books	Collections
Adelman (1976)	Bellel (1973)	Adelman (n.d.)
Atkin (1973)	Lutz & Iannaccone (1969)	Hamilton, Jenkins, King, MacDonald, & Parlett (1977)
Burnett-Hill (1973)	Parlett & Hamilton (1972)	Pohland (1972)
Easley (1974)		Roberts & Akinsanya (1976)
Erickson (1973)		Tikunoff & Ward (1977)
Hamilton (1976)		
Lutz & Ramsey (1974)		
Magoon (1977)		
Sindell (1969)		
Smith (1967)		
Smith & Pohland (1976)		
Wilson (1977)		

CHART 2

Methodological Statements on Educational Participant-Observation (Smith, 1978, p. 324).

underlying inquiry and evaluation. A second chart illustrates methodological statements, many of which would be described as educational evaluation.

Insert Chart 2 About Here

In summary, as Smith (1978) notes, "outside the dominate educational psychological paradigm in educational research, a larger body of research exists within the qualitative, ethnographic, participant-observation genre. Its roots lie especially in anthropology and several traditions of sociology. A brief overview ... suggests its applicability to a broad array of problems within education - schools, classrooms, curriculum development, and evaluation" (p. 329).

RESEARCH PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Ethnography as a research procedure differs from merely living through an experience and then recalling the experience. The data consists of extensive field notes based on non-interfering systematic observations which describe the events as they occur. There are several research phases, some of which overlap in the cognitive processes of data collection, analysis and synthesis.

Origins of the Problem

The research problem comes from the field in contrast to the literature review in hypothesis testing studies. The ethnographer usually begins with an initial knowledge of the setting (time, place, participants) and a general idea

of the planned event such as the introduction of a new program, an interagency cooperative effort to meet a state need for social studies materials, or everyday common and recurring events in education such as the implementation of new regulations or the use of a different teaching approach. In other words, empirical problems lie all around in varying forms and for the most part need only to be recognized for their possibilities. There is almost an "intuitive feel" for the problem in the form of "I wonder what would happen if..." origin of a research problem.

Foreshadowed Problems

The ethnographer begins with foreshadowed problems regarding the setting and the events in contrast to statistical hypotheses. Malinowski made the distinction between "foreshadowed problems" and "preconceived solutions". As he stated a half century ago:

> Good training in theory, and acquaintance with its latest results, is not identical with being burdened with "preconceived ideas." If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless. But the more problems he brings with him into the field, the more he is in the habit of molding his theories according to facts, and of seeing facts in their bearing upon theory, the better he is equipped for the work. Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies. (Malinowski, 1922, pp. 8-9)

Malinowski seems to call the investigator's attention to the need for an awareness of the theories, research, issues and debates in that area of social science in which the setting and the problem lie. Foreshadowed problems are those questions which represent an initial and partial analysis of the problem, a general idea of the thinking of people in relevant

research areas, and tentative modes of thinking. These questions are partially dependent upon the intellectual heritage which the ethnographer brings to the field and enables the investigator to recognize a problem.

The statement of foreshadowed problems or research questions also reflect the possible theoretical stance which may be utilized in the actual study. Whether one enters the field with sociological, psychological, organizational, or a political perspective, it seems important that this be made explicit. In essence, the ethnographer who enters the field with several conceptual frameworks or competing theories regarding the event such as learning, curriculum development, teaching, creativity, is able to recognize more easily what does occur and explore more fully the conceptual realities of the settings. As events unfold in the natural setting, the various conceptual frameworks and theories are cast aside or combined or re-worked until one has generated one's own concepts or variables which most closely fit reality.

In summary, there is an open-end quality to the research process. The approach is one of discovery rather than verification.

Obtaining a Valid Data Base

The data consists of extensive field notes taken in the setting as the exciting events unfold before the observer's eyes. The field notes produce a wealth of vivid and concrete images of the drama of human beings, groups, and institutions in motion. The ethnographer tries to capture it all - the unusual, the mundane, and the variety of the human condition. These reocurring waves of unorganized data from the ethnographer's periodically returning to the field generally upset one's cognitive map of structures, concepts, and point of view.

Summary observations are written as soon as the ethnographer leaves the field while the details and ideas are fresh. Summary observations synthesize the main events and more important, suggest questions and tentative interpretations. In both the field notes and summary observations, these tentative interpretations are separated by use of parentheses or some other notation. It seems important to jot these "insights" or "bright ideas" down when they occur. Sometimes they have a quality of free associations, cite analogies, note bodies of literature which may be useful, or describe contrasting situations.

Throughout the data collection process, one is continually searching for meaning. It is a search for broad themes, overall patterns, a way of putting order into the naturalistic phenomena. Simultaneously, the search continues in the literature for concepts and theoretical stances. One is continually reading, observing, and questioning. Often the patterns only become evident months later during data analysis.

To assure valid data, the ethnographer uses several procedures: Direct on-site observation, "muted cues" and "unobtrusive measures", intensive observation, and triangulation. The most elementary requirement of the methodology is participant-observation in the sense of "being in" the setting. This distinguishes the methodology from research based on surveys, interview schedules, laboratory settings, or tests which tend to make the subjects conscious of the research. The ethnographer's role is one of non-interfering or else he risks contamination of his data. Guba (1978) suggests possible sources of distortions which the ethnographer is constantly on the alert to prevent. W. F. Whyte (1952) noted in his study of Doc's gang that when the members treated him as if he were a lamp post on the street corner, then the validity of his data increased. When the ethnographer

senses that he has been accepted in the social scene as a natural part of the setting, then the participants indicate by many unobtrusive signs that they are acting in their usual manner.

Close observation in a setting produces what Andrew Haplin (1966) has called "muted cues" and what Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest (1966) have called "unobtrusive measures". As an observer, one listens and looks for the off hand comments and explanations, the raised eyebrows, the hints that anyone is behaving atypically. Reactions of pupils to a teacher, of teachers to an administrator, of staff members to each other, are constantly scanned in the unstructured moments or settings such as coffee breaks, lunch, changing of classes. Unobtrusive measures can be observed such as student drawings displayed in a hall, the lesson outline on the blackboard, the pile of "junk" brought in by students for a collage, the planning charts on an administrator's desk, the daily bulletins in a school, the system's newsletters to parents. These are the muted language, unobtrusive traces of a social life which often suggests unverbalized meanings that deepen the quality and validity of the data.

Extensive observation, meaning the length of time in the field, is a procedure to assure validity of the data. In general, field work is a labor-intensive mode of inquiry. The ethnographer continually returns to the field during the common-sense time boundaries of the event such as a semester, an academic year, the life of a project. Schools have a natural rhythm of organizational life and innovative projects which usually move through phases. Most ethnographic research and certain evaluation models are concerned with processes over time and changes. The length of time in the field depends upon the scope and focus of the research problem and will vary with each study.

Triangulation is a procedure to assure validity of the data. The essence lies in obtaining different kinds of data from different persons in different organizational positions in different settings over time. As Denzin (1971) noted, triangulation is qualitative cross-validation among multiple data sources, research methods and theoretical schemes. Similarly House (1977) states that

> Validity is provided by cross-checking different data sources and by testing perceptions against those of participants. Issues and questions arise from the people and situations being studied rather than from the investigator's preconceptions. Concepts and indicators "derive from the subject's world of meaning and action." In constructing explanations, the naturalist looks for convergence of his data sources and develops sequential, phase-like explanations that assume no event has single causes.
> House (1977), p. 31.

In a recent project, Dr. Boraks and I collected data in this approach and corraborated slices of data to arrive at the findings. Below is an example (Boraks and Schumacher, 1979).

1. Multiple methods:	observation casual conversations focused interviews documents: project proposal, social studies policy statements, state survey, unit outlines, PERT planning charts, director's journal.
2. Multiple participants:	state department officials school division central office personnel curriculum specialist director principal and teachers visiting monitoring team
3. Multiple situations:	project planning council meetings summer workshop teacher writing team meetings university curriculum resource center state department conferences
4. Multiple organizations:	state department of education school system university other state agencies and private organizations

Data analysis synthesizes the multiple perspectives and interrelations to demonstrate the "complexities" and "totality".

PRESENTING THE RESULTS: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH STUDIES

So far I have discussed research processes in terms of origins of the problem, foreshadowed problems, and obtaining a valid data base with implications for data analysis. Although variations exist in these procedures among ethnographers, there is sufficient commonality to recognize the methodology as a distinctive mode of inquiry. More divergency among ethnographic studies occur at the level of abstraction in phrasing the results (Smith, 1978). This is partially related to one's philosophy of science (Bruyn, 1966) and directly related to one's research purposes.

Most studies present a descriptive narrative, i.e., "tell the story" of the participants, settings and incidents. The focus has usually been one of groups and their activities which evolved over time. Process analysis is emphasized. The descriptive accounts, in lay language, are a synthesis of the many perspectives obtained from the multiple kinds of data. This represents the first level of interpretation, and for some studies, this is sufficient for the research purpose. The narration is a chronicle without a commitment to universal laws or a model of explanation for causes (Gardiner, 1961).

Other researchers go beyond the descriptive narrative to add an analytical-interpretive-theoretical dimension. Because case studies of classrooms or schools often have a holistic quality, they face the dilemma of the scope of theory. Various levels have been suggested (Glasser and Strauss, 1967; Merton, 1957; Zetterberg, 1965) such as miniature theories,

middle-range theories and substantive theories in contrast to abstract theory, formal theory, or general theory. Miniature or middle-range theories seem more appropriate for ethnographic studies. Concepts or variables are derived from the data. Examples of concepts developed in ethnographic studies are "conceptual clarity" (Smith and Schumacher, 1972) and "realistic opportunism" (Schumacher, 1974). The relationships between two or more concepts are the basis for hypotheses and theories. Ethnographic studies have developed miniature theories of pupil roles (Smith and Geoffrey, 1968), of individualized instruction (Smith and Keith, 1971), and of involuntary superintendent turnover (Iannaccone and Lutz, 1970) to name a few. Since the concepts or theories are derived from case studies, these provide direction for verification research, which can lead to further revision of the theory. Chart 3 demonstrates the function of ethnographic studies in the scientific process.

Insert Chart 3 About Here

Thus, ethnographic studies, in a discovery mode of inquiry, may find additional variables not yet identified in the literature and may provide a more valid means of operationalizing concepts for future verification studies.

PRESENTING THE RESULTS: EVALUATION STUDIES

During the last decade, the field of evaluation has emerged as a separate and distinct specialization which differs from pure or scientific re-

Ethnographic Inquiry and Education Research*

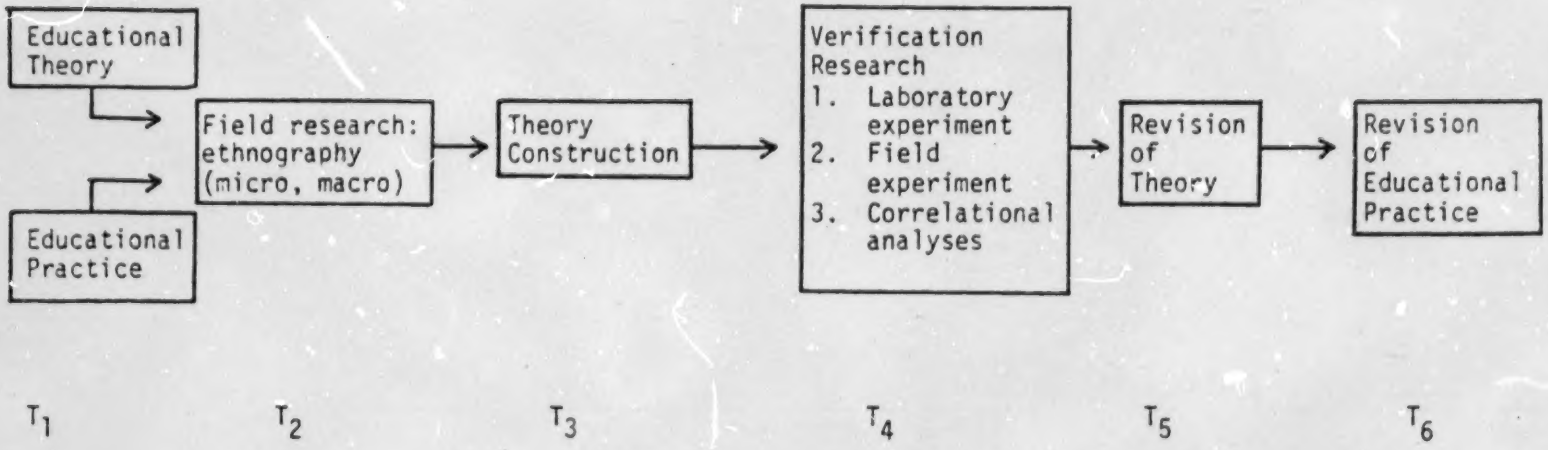

CHART 3

*Adopted from L. M. Smith and W. Geoffrey, The Complexities of an Urban Classroom: An Analyses toward a General Theory of Teaching. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 249.

search. Pure research aims at developing a body of verified knowledge for scientific prediction where meaning is derived from statistical significance in experimental and ex post facto studies. In contrast, evaluation studies assess the worth of a program in a case study design using qualitative and quantitative data where meaning is based on educational significance to various program participants and audiences.

Current thinking in the field of evaluation classifies experimental research studies, state and local testing programs, systems analysis studies, and the Tyler-Bloom-Popham objective-based studies as quasi-evaluation in the sense that these studies typically address the questions whose answers may or may not assess an educational program's worth. Evaluation studies which are designed primarily to assess an educational program's worth are those done within the models of decision-oriented evaluation (Stufflebeam, et al., 1971; Atkin, 1969), responsive evaluation (Stake, 1975), criticism-connoisseur evaluation (Eisner, 1975, Willis, 1978) and others. I will describe the CIPP decision-making model of evaluation and responsive evaluation and then suggest how ethnography has a central function in evaluation.

The CIPP model of evaluation focuses on the effectiveness of a program and requires the evaluator's use of professional judgment to determine whether the program's goals were attained. Evaluation is defined as "the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision-alternatives" (Stufflebeam, et al., 1971, p. 40). The evaluator collects and presents information needed by someone else who will determine the program's worth. The final determination of merit or worth of a program is that of the decision-maker and is not the evaluator's responsibility.

CIPP refers to four kinds of evaluation studies: Context, Input, Process and Product. Context evaluation describes the status of the educational

setting compared to present, probable and possible system outputs. The conclusion of context evaluation is a set of objectives for which an instructional program can be developed. Input evaluation provides data on how to use resources to achieve program objectives. Process evaluation is done once the program is implemented and identifies any planned components which are not being implemented as originally conceived. This is assessing the degree of implementation. Product evaluation describes or measures the attainments of an educational program. It helps make the decision to continue, terminate, modify or refocus an educational program.

R. Stake's (1975) responsive evaluation is also process analysis and emphasizes two operations - description and judgment. Stake believed the insensitivity to the perceived needs of those for whom the evaluation is being conducted has lead to an unresponsive, hence futile evaluation. He suggests ten prominent events in responsive evaluation which may be summarized as follows. The evaluator talks to the clients, program staff and evaluation audiences to obtain an overview of the program scope and activities. Second, after discovering the program purposes and concerns of the participants, the problems and issues are conceptualized and data needs identified. Third, observers and judges are selected and instruments, if any, are chosen. Antecedents, transactions and outcomes are assessed. Fourth, portrayals and case studies are written which match issues to audiences with different formats for different audiences.

These two models of evaluation have some commonalities. Different kinds of evaluation studies are needed at different stages of program development. Ethnography may be used as the primary methodology or combined with other methodologies. Data is collected from multiple sources, participants and settings. Process evaluation is necessary to obtain data on program in-

puts, development, implementation, and outcomes. The degree of program implementation is assessed before student outcomes. Unintended and intended outcomes are assessed. Outcomes are usually more broadly defined than student behavioral objectives. In other words, program effectiveness includes not only student outcomes but also the effect on the administration, the staff, community, and other groups. Thus the evaluation provides a comprehensive assessment.

CONCLUSIONS

Distinguishing characteristics of this mode of inquiry are the procedural and cognitive processes of the researcher. Ethnography is field-based in contrast to laboratory based or even viewing a setting as a laboratory. Extensive data is collected over time through noninterfering observations of events as they naturally unfold in contrast to intervention through use of random selection and assignment of subjects to treatments with manipulation of variables. Meaning is derived from qualitative analysis rather than quantitative. The stance is one of seeking a holistic viewpoint and multiple realities in contrast to a reductionist viewpoint which imposes constraints on antecedent conditions and/or on outcomes to investigate a limited number of variables. The purpose is one of discovery of phenomena and the interrelations among variables rather than the verification of hypotheses.

Ethnographic studies are used several ways to establish a body of verified scientific knowledge. Such studies can discover variables and relationships from which hypotheses are derived. Field studies tend to demonstrate educational complexities suggesting multiple causal factors

and plausible alternative hypotheses. In large scale projects with a number of research specialists, ethnography addresses the processes, the interrelationships between sub-studies and contextual-holistic questions which may aid in interpretation of more narrowly focused studies.

Ethnographic evaluation is appropriate when 1) the program or innovation must be systematically studied before more structured designs are utilized; 2) the evaluation is responsive to many audiences representing different values internal and external to the system; 3) evaluation findings need to be communicated in non-technical language; 4) the context of the events is important and self-evaluation by the participants is desired; and 5) the scope of the evaluation focus is broad including strengths, weaknesses and side effects anticipated and unanticipated.

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